

The voyage of Waka Tapu to Rapa Nui

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On December 6, 2012, two *waka hourua* (double-hulled sailing canoes) from Aotearoa (New Zealand) were welcomed on the shores of 'Anakena Beach on Rapa Nui. The voyage of the Waka Tapu canoes, *Te Aurere* and *Ngahiraka-Mai-Tawhiti*, took 16 weeks to complete. The crew of the *waka* relied exclusively on traditional celestial navigation and wayfinding techniques to navigate across the Pacific (there were GPS units on board that were only used to update their positions so that people could track their progress on the 10,000 nautical mile journey). The canoes made two stops en route to their final destination of Rapa Nui, stopping on Tubuai in the Austral Islands and on the island of Mangareva to restock their supplies and make necessary repairs to the vessels.

The journey began as a vision of Hekenukumai Busby, who, following the arrival of the Hawaiian voyaging canoe *Hōkūle'a* to Waitangi Harbour in New Zealand in 1985, was inspired to build a voyaging canoe. Busby worked closely with John Rangihau to build *Te Aurere*, which was Aotearoa's first voyaging canoe (www.wakatapu.com). Following its maiden voyage, which was undertaken with Master Navigator Mau Piailug to Rarotonga in 1992, *Te Aurere* sailed to Tahiti, the Marquesas, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island, and Hawai'i. The *waka* also circumnavigated Te Ika o Maui (the North Island of New Zealand). Over the

years, *Te Aurere* has sailed together with *Hōkūle'a* from Hawai'i and *Te Au o Tonga* from the Cook Islands, among other Polynesian sailing canoes, and has played a prominent role in the reconnaissance of Polynesian voyaging that has taken place since the inaugural voyage of *Hōkūle'a* from Hawai'i to Tahiti back in 1976 (www.teaurere.org.nz).

Together with *Te Aurere*, *Ngahiraka-Mai-Tawhiti* left the shores of Aotearoa in August 2012 bound for Rapa Nui (Figures 1 and 2). *Ngahiraka-Mai-Tawhiti* was also built by Hekenukumai Busby and was named after his late wife. Hekenukumai and his wife Ngahiraka dreamed of making the voyage to Rapa Nui together, and he carried on this shared dream in her honor. At 80 years old, the master canoe maker was unable to travel onboard the *waka* on this epic voyage. However, Busby flew to Rapa Nui to greet the crew of 20 men and women at 'Anakena and he played a central role in the proceedings of the welcoming ceremony on December 6, 2012.

The canoes were welcomed by a large group of Rapanui performers and cultural practitioners on the beach at 'Anakena as hundreds of spectators looked on (Figure 3). The group proceeded to the navigational *ahu* that was built by Karlo Huckle for the arrival of *Hōkūle'a* to Rapa Nui in 1999, where two *umu tahu* (ceremonial earth ovens) were unearthed, there were a



Figure 1. *Te Aurere* leaving the Viaduct Harbour in Auckland, New Zealand on 16 August 2012 (photo courtesy of the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute).

number of speeches, music and dancing, and a riveting *haka* was performed by the Waka Tapu crew. From there, the welcoming ceremony continued in front of Ahu Nau Nau, where the ceremony culminated with the awakening of one of the *moai* on Ahu Nau Nau (Figure 4). Hekenukumai Busby led the *pōwhiri* and the *tapu* was lifted from *Te Aurere*, which was consecrated for the voyage and was sailed exclusively by male crew members (*Ngahiraka-Mai-Tawhiti* had both men and women on board). His heartfelt speech was followed by the exchange of gifts (Figure 5) and another *haka* by the Waka Tapu crew (Figure 6), as well as performances by Rapanui dancers and musicians. In true Rapanui style, crew members were invited to dance with Rapanui dancers. Emotions ran high as the welcome ceremony continued throughout the day, and a large community *umu* was opened for all present at the festivities to share. Following the welcoming ceremony, I had the opportunity to talk with many of the crew members of Waka Tapu under the shade of the palm trees at ‘Anakena. Everyone I spoke with was impressed with the warm welcome and the wonderful hospitality of the entire community on Rapa Nui, and

they were each struck by the powerful emotions that their voyage had brought forth in themselves as well as the Rapanui community.

Following their epic voyage to Rapa Nui, the *waka* stayed in Hanga Piko for nearly three weeks. While waiting for supplies to repair damage sustained to *Te Aurere* during the final leg of the voyage, the crew members were able to spend time getting to know the people of Rapa Nui, and they invited members of the local community to join them on numerous afternoon sailing trips around the island. When they departed on December 26 for Tahiti, they took two Rapanui crew members on board, Serafina Moulton Tepano and Io Haoa Hotus, and arrived in Tahiti on January 31, 2013 (Figure 7). The *waka* anchored in Cook’s Bay on Mo‘orea for 2 months to wait out the cyclone season before continuing on the return voyage to Aotearoa on April 1, 2013. Sera and Io joined them on board for the next leg of the return voyage, along with seven Tahitian crew members. They arrived on Rarotonga in the Southern Cook Islands on April 9, 2013 en route back to Aotearoa. Additional information about the voyage can be found at www.wakatapu.com.



Figure 2. Some of the crew onboard *Te Aurere* arriving to Rapa Nui. Front left – Jacob Raumati de Beurs, front right – Toiora Hawira, middle left – Martin Bercic, middle right – Stanley Conrad, back – Moko Henare (photo courtesy of the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute).



Figure 3. Arrival of *Te Aurere* and *Ngahiraka-Mai-Tawhiti* at ‘Anakena Beach (photo by the author).



Figure 4. Rapanui men installing the eyes of a *moai* at Ahu Nau Nau (photo by Waka Tapu crew member Haimona Brown).



Figure 5. *Kaihautu* Kiharoa Nuku preparing to gift Awhiorangi to Rapanui. (photo courtesy of the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute).



Figure 6. Haka performance by Waka Tapu crew members in front of Ahu Nau Nau (photo by the author).



Figure 7. Io Haoa Hotus arriving in Mo'orea (photo courtesy of the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute).